

Rabbi Alan Berg
Satan in America 4
High Zionism – What it was. What did it mean?

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On Monday September 9, 1935 in a private circulated dispatch, The Jewish Telegraphic Agency – an American project of Va-ad Leumi – the Jewish National Council in Palestine – by the way having the same name as the Jewish national council for the Jewish post-medieval nation the Council of Four Lands – published a ten page document marked “Not for Circulation – For Personal Use Only; (and now available on the web) containing the following:

“At a Zionist Congress in Vienna” – a meeting organized to supplant all other Zionist leadership, ideas and activities, now with that of Vladimir Jabotinsky and his movement, which he started in the 1910s in Palestine, Revisionist Zionism.

Jabotinsky, who maintained contacts with both Polish and German officials, and that is where he went in Europe after departing from Palestine in 1920 – “...things seemed to be getting worse for the Jews,” Jabotinsky declared in Vienna, and that the British and the Germans are equal enemies of the Jews of Palestine.

At that meeting, Jacob DeHass, Herzl’s former confidant, America’s leading Zionist, the man who brought Louis Brandies to Zionism, the head of the JTA, the most veteran American Zionist, “expressed the conviction that (Jabotinsky) it will win the day for ‘renewal of the destiny of Palestine on both sides of the Jordan.’”

This is from the Mediterranean to the West Bank, and across to the part of today’s Jordan that is on east bank of the Jordan River.

Then, according to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency article, Jabotinsky, at that time the leading militant in all of Zionism, Jabotinsky in an address declared that he spoke in the name of 700,000 electors; he

explained the tragic failure of Jewish emancipation – something that he had spent the last 15 years working to disable.

At this same time, 1935, the British governing authority in Palestine announced a desperate call for a legislative council representative of all Palestine parties to address the mounting violence between Arabs and Jews.

Jabotinsky declared that the Revisionist Congress would oppose the British plan for such a council and characterized the project as “treachery to the Jewish people.” Jabotinsky announced a 10 year plan for settling a Jewish majority on both sides of the Jordan by settling one and a half million Jews from the areas of the former Council.

He demanded the promotion, as opposed to the Labor Zionists, of private capital and initiative, and advocated working with sympathetic Christians, hearkening back to the free trade vision of the Council of Four Lands.

His organization Jabotinsky asserted, will seek not only to build Palestine but to also eliminate the diaspora.

Declaring that the aim of the organization is ‘the high Zionism,’ does not mean the solution of the diaspora problem by the mere creation of a model Jewish state in Palestine, rather by the liquidation (a poor choice of words) of the diaspora with a return of Jews to their homeland.

The Jewish State, he declared is not the end, but only the first step;

The second being the return of the people, which will be the solution of the Jewish dilemma.

The third step will be the creation of a national center of culture, radiating its influence all over the world.

(context: The day before the German Zionists, labor, were explaining the Transfer Agreement to American Jews. See scholars such as Daniel Heller on this.)

It's a combination of social engineering and messianism. Here we are again with the Jews being taken to Israel.

The number of one and half million – behind that lay Jabotinsky's informed calculation that Transjordan the east side – today's Jordan, could provide agricultural jobs for that many.

In 1935 there were 9 and a half million Jews in Europe, of which 8 million were from the former land area of the Council of Four Lands, almost half of that in Poland, and 15.3 million total Jews in the world.

(from Fire Out of Zion) “The worldwide recession had particularly baneful effects on the Polish Jews. Over a million were unemployed and unemployable....Dependent on charity, crowded into slums, a drain on Poland's declining assets.

“Even those more fortunate Jews ...found anti-Semitism defined as the policy of the state....Those in professional or commercial positions were drawn into penury” – destitution....the very size of the Jewish community 3,500,000 compounded the Polish problem.”

Both the Poles and Jabotinsky through the Prometheus project struggled with what was to happen to the millions. Jabotinsky recognized, “We have got to save millions.”

“The Poles listened. A man who advocated smashing in the gates of Palestine with a million immigrants might well be a man who could aid in solving Poland's Jewish problem. To get rid of a great many Jews would be a net gain.

“Early in 1937 Jabotinsky came to a Warsaw dinner...with two dozen Polish officials, members of the secret service, army officers and Count Lubinsky of the Foreign Office. “What gradually evolved by 1938 was an unofficial alliance. The Poles would train and supply a

military expedition composed largely of Polish Betarim, Jewish men and women sympathetic to Revisionism and Jabotinsky, and also some Jewish Palestinian officers would be trained at these Betar – Revisionist military camps.

“Polish arms were turned over to Begin to be smuggled into Palestine.”

The Poles had a name for this policy – Prometheanism. For the Greek figure who brought fire from heaven and gave it to humans.

It’s a broad statement, but Jabotinsky rejected the Enlightenment tradition. He advocated for all education going through Orthodox yeshivas, he was opposed to labor rights women’s rights, and unions, and viewed Jews in western countries, including England and the US, ... (as) a faction that threatened Zionism wherever they were – from Terror Out of Zion by highly respected Columbia professor John Bower Bell, as an enemy.

When we learn of Jabotinsky and his ideas and efforts, he seems to us almost, in the words of another descendent as was Jabotinsky, of Odessa, like a complete unknown.

And yet, arguably, he is more at the heart of modern Jewish history than any other figure at all.

How could that be?

Similarly, are there things in my life, each of us has to ask ourselves, that is just like that, central, but not understood, or conscious of.

Things that are at the core that we don’t know about, or can’t believe.

In 1940, a lonely man having left his wife behind to join him later, but she never would before he died, Jabotinsky moved to America. Benzion Netanyahu became his executive assistant.

Camp Betar in Hunter New York was the site of Jabotinsky's death from a heart attack on August 4, 1940, a few months after he came to America.

Although by the time even the most elderly among us attended Jewish camps, they were definitely not militant, more social than political; a place to combine growing up, nature and Judaism.

With the same idea underpinnings, in the 30s and 40s, in those days the early 1940s, their antecedents were the militant, mainly Polish, Betar camps; settings where the Polish government funded and provided hands-on military training for Jews to clandestinely be sent to drive the British out, and create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Jabotinsky first came to Camp Betar in Hunter on July 13, 1940. Three weeks before he would return and die there.

He was met by uniformed Betarim in perfect formation, and spent the evening singing songs he had written for Betar. On a peculiar hard to fathom level, Jabotinsky had a similar experience to ours; whether it is Camp Betar in New York, or Camp Herzl, which would be founded near St. Paul, Minnesota by Harry and Rose Rosenthal.

Reading the authorized biography by Joseph Schectman, Jabotinsky, the most militant activist in all of Jewish history seems to have fallen for the Woodstock like landscapes of nearby Hunter Mountain, for Camp Betar, the same way all us fell for the landscapes of the camps we went to.

He was buried at a Jewish cemetery on Long Island, and hundred and fifty cantors sang at his funeral.

It would be more than a year before word of his death reached the Jews of Warsaw, imprisoned by the Nazis in the Warsaw ghetto; news of his death further

weakened any sense of hope, his death viewed as grievously as the Jews of the Council of Four Lands experienced their collapse and powerlessness after the Chelmitsky massacres.

There seems to be a treasured relationship between Jews and American landscapes. We can read of Mark Twain and *Life on the Mississippi* as if it is our place and our story. Our river.

Emeritus Rabbi of Temple Beth Israel Emanuel Rose attended Camp Betar in Hunter in the early 1940s, where he would visit with his uncle Rabbi Herbert Rose.

Years ago I asked Rabbi Rose, when he was there, what was it like, what did he see? Did he see Jabotinsky? His memories were of sports, good times. It was camp. 'I saw nothing of politics.'

I think in a strange way, in those last weeks, Jabotinsky saw nothing of politics either.

Camp Betar, set in Hunter, is a part of the northern, upperstate New York landscapes that encompass Rheinbeck, Woodstock, and not too far south, Elmira, New York where Mark Twain wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, and further east from Hunter, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where Melville wrote *Moby Dick*.

This entire area is the heart of American transcendental spirituality, where the land has a relationship with whoever is on it; no less for Vladimir Jabotinsky, from Odessa, by way of Jerusalem, by way of Poland to the place where the Catskills meet the Adirondacks.

Shortly before he died Jabotinsky said that help for his cause could be found in Canada.

He was thinking of Harry and Rose Rosenthal, members of the Windsor Canada Jewish community, whose lives are recounted in *The Jews of Windsor* by Rabbi Jonathan Plaut.

Rose and Harry were in 1946, head of the Windsor Canada Zionist Federation.

In 1946 we find listed in the Camp Herzl Hall of Fame website, as one of five inductees of the Camp Herzl Hall of Fame, Harry and Rose Rosenthal, with this note: "The idea of Camp Herzl was born of the experiences of Harry and Rose Rosenthal. After the Rosenthal's sent their daughter to a Jewish camp on the east coast, they felt that the Midwest should have a Zionist camp a little closer to home. From that first summer with 60 campers, over 30,000 Jewish youth have been exposed to the magic that is Camp Herzl.

As it happened, the Rosenthal's daughter had attended Brandeis Camp in the Poconos which by 1945 was a very different style of Zionist camping than Camp Betar, with all of the militancy dropped from view and an American post-war feel. But the goal of integrating Zionism and then Israel into the identities of American Jews, and with a Ben-Gurion feel of encouraging *aliyah*, the ideology is a constant.

Seven years after the camp was started by the Rosenthal's at White Bear Lake Camp; in the mid-1950s it was moved to Devil's Lake at Webster, Wisconsin.

Devil's Lake.

Camp Herzl was the new American, post-Israel statehood version of Betar's American camps. Basically the same program and philosophy, but with Israel a state, there was no need to train brigades in the diaspora, so flag raising in the morning no longer included rifles.

Camp Herzl's first brochure had this: Herzl Camp's aim was "to bring a child closer to Jewish life, and the Jewish people...and to prepare the child to absorb the content and values of modern Palestine...to enlist the child's interest in the building of the Jewish Nation.

One cannot imagine what went on in the head of 13 year old Robert Zimmerman when he arrived there in 1954, for the first of three summers?

We can see an episode that is revealing – Zimmerman, who would go on to be, like Jabotinsky, wildly influential...in his last year there, 1957, 16 year old Zimmerman submitted a poem titled *Little Buddy* to the Herzl Camp newspaper.

On 2009, that manuscript was on sale for actual auction at Christies, when it came out that it was actually with few variations, a country western lyric by Hank Snow.

What was he about?

And so many among those who would play with him: Michael Bloomfield, Alan Kooper, Robbie Robertson, were Jews with ancestry in the Four Lands, who put their stamp on African-American Blues.

That manuscript, with lyrics not by Zimmerman but by Hank Snow, because it was written in Zimmerman's hand, still sold at Christies for \$12,500, with the proceeds donated to Camp Herzl.

As Bob Dylan, Zimmerman, now seventy-five, would embrace all forms of American music, appropriating form after form; and above all showing in a song like *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* or *Blowing in the Wind*, a transcendent empathy for diversity that would parallel in my heart and I think in the hearts of 80 percent of American Jews, Jabotinsky's, now Israel's, emphasis on Jewish peoplehood, the centrality of Israel, and pride.

No less than Jabotinsky did to save Judaism, Dylan similarly uses culture, art, language and religion to motivate Americans to save the republic.

And this for his time was what Isaac Bashevis Singer was trying to do when he wrote in *Satan in Goray*, "Shabbtai Tzvi is his name, may he be erased from the book of life.

“He shall take for wife the 13 year old daughter of Master Moses. He shall come back to us riding on a lion to raise up the fallen tabernacle of King David.

“These tidings have brought great confusion to the tent of Israel in Poland, for the wound we got at the hands of the murderer Chelminiki (may his name perish) and from the other cruel men like him, are still festering, and the remnant of Israel is greatly impoverished, and our pride is fallen to the earth.

“I swear by the living God that Shabbtai Tzvi is not the Messiah.”

I finished this writing and put down my pen.

I turned the radio on, and heard live from Israel on MSNBC, the funeral of Shimon Peres. I heard a commentator say that President Obama had ordered every flag in America to be flown at half-mast in honor and memory of Peres, President and Prime Minister.

Peres...who was born on August 2, 1923 in Volozhon, Belarus.

A village that was once a part of the great Jewish Nation called the Council of Four Lands.

and now he was honored and remembered by friend and enemy, by all, as he was laid to rest in its successor, the Land of Israel.

The End.